

FOLK LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

classified into believers and non-believers, on the basis of the Moslem faith, and they are hardly aware of concepts like race or class. 571 [71]

Silwa is to be considered basically as a folk community to the extent that human relations are not only of the personal, face to face type, but also familial. Social behaviour and mutual obligations are built upon the family relationship pattern, with regard to age, sex and status. Family relations are extended outwards to include the whole range of the community, and kinship bonds are the moral force behind village cohesion and group solidarity. Marriage, for instance, has its preferential bias towards cousins and relatives, and is an undertaking that implies the bringing together of two families. [580]

Together with the emphasis on the family, one adds, to specify the degree of folkhood in Silwa community, such items of behaviour as the observation of patriarchal authority and respect relationship between the old and the young, and the reciprocal rights and duties between kinsfolk.

Moreover, sanctity and sacred sanctions lie at the foundation of a great deal of human activities and behaviour in the village; and ideally the sacred not only prevails over the profane, but sanctions and to some extent directs it. According to the villagers' view, 'life on this earth is like a farm, the harvest of which will be reaped in the next world'. Social acts and value judgment are grouped into two main religious categories: haram (forbidden) and halal (allowed), two words which have a distinctively religious flavour. Alongside the sanction of 'ar (social shaming) the notion of haram is another strong sanction for condemning a person who violates any of the prescriptions of the Koran or any moral or social norm. 771 [66]

To introduce acts of piety or holy symbols into everyday life is the best means of producing 'baraka', to mention God's name at the beginning of the meal, to thank Him at the end of it, to elicit His help on travelling, to count by saying 'God is one, second to none, three, the Caliphs are four'—as such religious ritual invokes holiness—'baraka'. To engage in Koran reading and reciting and to be able to quote the sacred language of the Koran, the Tradition and the sayings of the pious ancestors, is a sublime and ennobling occupation. It is not surprising that the villagers' spirit is always captivated by the story of the woman who, whenever asked about any matter, always gave an answer by quoting from the Koran.¹ 771 [78]

Cleanliness is envisaged mainly, not in terms of absence of dirt, but as the removal or absence of things that bring about religious impurity. To be in a state of valid ablutions is cleanliness, while the opposite is filthiness—'nagasa'. Attendance to such matters is more important than being clean or dirty in the secular, hygienic sense. Lustration as prescribed by the Koran, to wash one's private parts after evacuation, renders one clean and ready for saying one's prayers and is necessary for reading, reciting, or even touching the Koran. After sexual intercourse, husband and wife are enjoined to take a bath in a prescribed way, otherwise they are unclean. [514] • [833]

¹ See Appendix V for the full text of the story.

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any difference or separation between religion and the rest of life. 'It is most true that, in the more remote communities, the behaviour expected of kinsmen rests under the warrant of ritual and religion. . . . In the villages, one behaves toward an older male cousin in accordance with that pattern of respect for elders and kinsmen, compliance with which people believe to be essential to virtue. . . . In the remoter villages, the uncontrovertible gravity of the relationship is announced to the individual again and again in the rituals of "paying respects" and of hand-washing. The plan for conduct . . . is a sacred plan, well documented with ritual and belief.'

The folk life of Silwa as previously outlined provides the background and setting for a study of culture change in the Egyptian society as a whole. One can see that many of the trends of historical change follow to a considerable extent Redfield's hypothesis of the transformation of folk life into civilization. In reading Lane's description of Cairo life of over a century ago, before the full impact of Western techniques and civilization, one can identify more or less the same design of living in Cairo as exists at present in Silwa.² Throughout the book the reader notices in the mid nineteenth century Cairo society, the all-pervading religious frame of reference mingled with magical rites; the importance of such institutions as the family, the abundance of folk medicine, attitudes towards authority, age and sex, similar to those held and observed at present in isolated communities such as Silwa.

However, this does not mean that Silwa has not been itself changing, as evidenced by statements from the older generation and observed by the writer himself. The trend on the whole is towards imitating the city pattern of life, especially in its material aspects. A common saying, especially amongst the youth, is 'If you want wealth and elevation, go and live in the cities, for poverty is the heritage of rural life'. Yet what the villagers of Silwa want and have started to imitate is not the Europeanized type of city dwellers but the Arab section of city dwellers. No one in Silwa has ever entertained the idea of wearing a European dress. Some of the new generation and those who have been to town might wear a smaller turban, manufactured shoes instead of the hand-made markoob, a manufactured woollen galabia, or tob instead of the zabout woven on the village loom. On special occasions they imitate the city way of cooking their vegetables and meat, using tomato juice instead of the traditional way of boiling and spicing it.

The imitation of city ways is to a large extent connected with prestige values. Two clans have, for instance, incorporated a latrine in their guest houses, imitating the Omda of the village, while there is none in their own houses. On festival and religious occasions, it is always desirable for a clan or a family to invite a Koran reciter from town even if his voice is not as

² Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 209.

³ Edward William Lane, *Customs and Manners of Modern Egyptians*.

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854 garment. This cloth can be removed, washed, or just dried, or changed. The child is often wiped with another cloth, but is not necessarily washed, if it soils itself. At the fourth month it is supported between its mother's feet, sitting to defaecate when the mother senses that it is uncomfortable or when it cries, and the cloth is put on only when it goes to bed. No fuss of any kind is made about urine, while more attention is given to faeces, yet revulsion is never shown by the mother. When the child starts to walk it is trained to say 'kaka' when it wants to defaecate, whereupon the mother lifts its garment and asks it to go to a special corner or room in the house or to go outside. After the age of three or four most parents insist that both boys and girls defaecate outside the house, or go to the special room in the house.

• 514 While the boys from now on always perform their evacuation outside, the girls are confined to the house again after they reach the age of twelve. Girls always squat for urination while boys stand, but on reaching adolescence the latter squat also. In the case of boys, the tucking up of the dress or pants and the crouching posture of evacuation tend to direct attention to the exposed genitals, while in the case of girls, after the age of six or seven at most, they, in contrast, envelop the whole process with their dress, which is never tucked up. One can see boys of all ages up to eight or nine evacuating within sight, with no sense of embarrassment. When they reach puberty they seek out-of-the-way places, facing a stone or a heap.

863 It is not without justification that one can make the hypothesis that the absence of disgust towards faeces and urine with regard to the infants' early training is a cultural way of conditioning the individual to bear tolerantly the odour that attends the village sanitary conditions, swamps, and handling of animal dung either as fertilizer or as fuel.

856 Sitting and teething are considered as important events to be watched in the child's growth. By the end of the fourth month the mother begins to train her child to sit up. The saying is that a boy of four months must be able to sit up, or he should be beaten. The girl is expected to be able to sit up a little later, at the end of the fifth month. The mother makes her son sit up on the ground with his legs outstretched, supporting his back with her hands, or puts him in a large mixing or cooking pan with tall curving sides. If the boy is not taught to sit up for himself at this age, and abandon gradually the horizontal suckling position, he would be liable to have an unpleasant breath smell when he grows up.

[827] It is also recognized that teething is accompanied by either ophthalmia or diarrhoea. The mother's milk is sometimes used as a treatment for the sore eyes at this period.

[57] On the first instance of the breaking of any of the milk teeth, at the age of five or six, the tooth is put into donkey dung and thrown into the 'sun's eye', asking the sun to change the donkey's tooth for a tooth of a gazelle.

[304] Another important event in the child's life after the end of the forty

ADOLESCENCE, SEX AND MARRIAGE

Summing up the first dominant norm during the adolescent stage, one finds that boys and girls accept responsibility for active work and are characterized by the elimination of play elements compared with childhood (and submission to parental authority as an ennobling virtue. 882 183

By the age of sixteen or seventeen the adolescent boys toe the line of adults, who reluctantly allow children to play their games or tell stories, provided they are assured of their victory in due course. The age-group of adolescents is interested in real issues and happenings of the village, e.g. disputes, ceremonies, neighbours' gossip, the new camel or bull that so-and-so bought, things that their families sell or buy in the market, the times of sowing and harvesting. Even in their interest in stories, it is the Jiha type of story with its realistic touch, and those of life or miraculous feats of saints rather than the fables that interest them. 883

The attitudes towards sex represent the second norm that becomes dominant in the individual's life at this stage. It is true that sex segregation of children in play, the boys' abandoning of their earrings (while girls keep them), starts earlier, at the age of nine and ten years, but it is almost fully established by the age of twelve and thirteen.¹ 882 183 831 882

Sex organs now become pudenda and adolescents become careful about the way they sit or what they wear. The notion of shame (Ar) is primarily a word connoting sex disgrace or sexual infidelity. This is the first association that arises in the villager's mind, and has been extended to comprise 'every forbidden impropriety, from a trifling breach of etiquette to the most serious moral turpitude'.² The first real emotional feeling of what it means to bring 'ar' to one's family comes through the excessive shame connected with sex organs. Adolescent boys urinate out of sight, while the girls make use of a private room inside the house. Boys wear long pants, whereas girls wear a headcloth to cover part of their face and their breasts on passing by men.³ For both, any conversation about sex is taboo, and they are forbidden to talk about it to their parents or to any grown-up. Chastity as a moral and religious ideal implies the avoidance of any stimulating pleasurable influence from the opposite sex, or talking about sex. Adolescent girls are not encouraged to look attractive for fear of tempting 514 834

Japanese rely on maximizing the restraints upon him. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, p. 254. This generalization applies, on the whole, to the methods of socialization in Silwa. 882

¹ I noticed that some boys and girls in their free drawings used to draw a line between men and women in a wedding ceremony or a pilgrims' procession. In the Rorschach testing the contrast between the two sexes was expressed in phrases such as 'These are women wearing black and these are men wearing white' although there was nothing in the blot to match statements like this.

² W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures and Essays*, London, 1912, p. 156. This word 'ar' is different from 'L'ar' or 'al'ard' as pronounced in Silwa which means 'protection' and is said to invoke the help of another person. See E. Westermarck, 'L'ar or the Transference of Conditional Curses in Morocco', in *Anthropological Essays presented to E. B. Tylor*, Oxford, 1907.

³ I was told that neither women nor adolescent girls wear any special clothes for menstruation. 841

4 [For examples, see Category 185 116, pp. 179-183---AnalYST]

up and is transmitted in water and sodden ground, in the stagnant village ponds, and, since the development of perennial irrigation, in the standing water of runnels and badly levelled canals.

Bilharzia is not in itself a serious disease. But, beginning with the passing of blood in the urine, it often develops, through lack of attention, into complications such as the stone, fistula, and ulceration of the penis. The infection may reach the kidneys, the liver and even the eyes. Above all, it lasts for 18 or 20 years. 90% of the male fellahen are affected by it and become accustomed to passing blood and feeling continually below par.

Bilharzia is transmitted through urine and water; hookworm through earth and excrement. Like bilharzia, hookworm is a collective disease, a permanent epidemic, and is introduced into the system by a parasite which passes through the skin. Ankylostomiasis is less widespread than bilharzia, but more dangerous, since it consumes the red corpuscles of the blood (").

As the fellahen never make use of human dung, and have never learnt the use of latrines, they relieve themselves no matter where. If they are already infected with the worm, every such place is a new source of danger to their fellows, who walk barefoot or lie down heedlessly on the ground. The worm can move several feet in the darkness; it settles in damp soil, whence it passes through the skin to the intestines.

You may see countless men and women in the prime of life who are stricken with this disease, their faces puffy and lifeless with its ravages. Neither their vigorous constitution, their youth, nor the treatment they receive has been able to save them.

Malaria, spread by the ricefields and *birkas*, affects 65% of the fellahen, and in some villages East of the Delta as many as 90%.

What makes these three diseases so alarming is not so much their inherent seriousness as their constantly widening extent, and the way in which the fellahen themselves by their work and their manner of life contribute unconsciously to the perpetuation of the evil. It should also be remarked that the Government's measures to combat these diseases have not as yet had very much effect.